

What is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?



Rick D. Rudd¹
Agricultural Education and Communication
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611-0540

Abstract

Given the increased public interest in accountability and utility of post-secondary education, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has taken center stage in the academy. This article attempts to define the scholarship of teaching and learning beginning with the work of Boyer (1990), and continuing through to the current efforts of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (2005). The current literature is reflected well in Lee Schulman's (2000a), definition of scholarly activity: the scholarship of teaching and learning should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one's scholarly community. Finally, this article highlights how the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA) promotes the scholarship of teaching and learning in colleges of agricultural and life sciences across North America.

Introduction

I have often been asked, "Why should I join the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA)?" I have used (and heard) a number of answers over the years, including that NACTA is a great group of faculty members interested in teaching, you can publish in the NACTA Journal, we have a great annual meeting, and you can learn from others professional educators in the agricultural and life sciences. All of these are legitimate reasons to join NACTA, but fall short of the big picture of why NACTA is vital to the academy and why individual faculty members should join our organization. I propose that NACTA is a primary catalyst in the agricultural and life sciences to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Boyer (1990) set in motion a series of changes in his landmark publication, "Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities for the Professorate" that continue to impact academia today. Boyer proposed reframing scholarship to reflect the full range of faculty activity including traditional scholarship (basic research), the scholarship of integration (compilation and interpretation of original research, new insights from existing research), the scholarship of application (professional services and outreach based on scholarly expertise), and the scholarship of teaching. Boyer describes the teacher-scholar as a faculty member who is knowledgeable of the discipline, knows and utilizes effective

teaching methodology, and is committed to continued professional growth as a teacher. Many in higher education consider this publication to be the Genesis of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Hutchings et al., 1998).

Defining the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Much has been written and discussed in academic circles since Boyer's publication in 1990, yet the process of defining and operationalizing the scholarship of teaching and learning has been a challenge (Atkinson, 2001). Kreber (2001) contends that the scholarship of teaching remains ambiguous and therefore difficult to practice. Unfortunately, much of the writing and discussion leaves faculty members still searching for meaning in the scholarship of teaching. Although many faculty members who teach would welcome the label of "scholarship" attached to our teaching, reaching that point has been elusive.

On the other hand, Atkinson (2001) asserts that a transformational change is happening in higher education. This change, centered on SoTL, will transform institutions of higher learning by elevating teaching and learning to a central activity in the academy. Atkinson points to the Carnegie classification system for research instituted in January, 2000 that includes teaching and service activity and the National Science Foundations-criterion #2 for broader impacts of research including teaching and outreach as evidence of this cultural shift. Fortunately, many teaching scholars are paving the way for progress.

Lee Schulman (2000a), President of the Carnegie Academy for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning defines scholarly activity as follows: "For an activity to be designated as scholarship, it should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one's scholarly community." This definition forms the foundation of SoTL today.

Brookfield (1995) points out that scholarly teachers take the same scholarly approach to teaching as they would to other forms of scholarship (e.g. traditional, integration, and application scholarship). The scholarship of teaching includes study in teaching and learning, practice, reflection, and assessment of teaching. Teaching-scholars also discuss teaching and learning with other scholars to learn new

¹ Associate Professor; Email: rrudd@mail.ifas.ufl.edu

techniques, increase their knowledge base, and seek critiques that lead to improvement.

Classic, et al. (1997) published a follow-up to Boyer's (1990) original work that helped refine the scholarship of teaching and learning. Six standards of the scholarship of teaching are proposed by the authors including; clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results (student learning), effective presentation, and reflective critique. The scholarship of teaching is reflective, replicable, systematic, and public (Bender and Gray 1999).

Boyer's (1990) original work did not make a clear distinction between scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Schulman (2000b) makes an important distinction between the two. Scholarly teaching is well grounded in the discipline, has sound sources, utilizes appropriate resources, reflects thoughtful construction and implementation of ideas and examples, utilizes appropriate course design, and is clear and meaningful. It is expected in institutions of higher learning and is recognized by professional educators as "good teaching."

Schulman compares scholarly teaching to clinical work in the medical community. The clinical work is valuable and necessary for an excellent medical school. But the clinical work is not scholarly until it is shared, critiqued, and refined by the medical community. Scholarly teaching does not in and of itself represent the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The scholarship of teaching and learning is achieved only when our work as teachers becomes public, is peer reviewed and critiqued, and is built upon by other teacher – scholars. The scholarship of teaching and learning that exists today is the building block for the scholarship of teaching and learning yet to come.

Key Elements in Practicing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

A. Public

In this age of public accountability, it is increasingly important to share the great things happening in our classrooms and academic programs. This tenant of the scholarship of teaching and learning is a critical link between the academy and the public. We must overcome the barriers in place that block public review and criticism of the teaching and learning that occurs on our campuses. Welcoming assessment to show that we are accountable, increasing external review, showing gains in student achievement, reviewing and refining teaching methods, and discovering teaching and learning innovations must be done in full public view to earn the label of scholarship.

Many venues exist for making our teaching public: awards, meetings, publications, presentations, and beyond... Making our teaching public is the

gateway criteria for the scholarship of teaching and learning.

B. Critiqued

Just as basic science is critiqued and improved, the scholarship of teaching can only be advanced through peer review and critique. Critique by other scholars will advance the scholarship of teaching and learning. Hiding our teaching from critical review will not. Barriers such as perceived intrusions on academic freedom must be overcome to advance the scholarship of teaching.

A word of caution is appropriate however. We should not be tempted to resort to refereed journal articles as our only source of critical review. Although this is an excellent way to show scholarship, it is only one method of critique. Other means such as peer review, panel reviews, discussion forums, oral and poster presentations should be employed and valued.

C. Improved and Shared

Scholarship in any discipline must continue to improve to be of use to practitioners and constituents. The scholarship of teaching and learning is no different. Improvements made from the public and scholarly review continues to build current and relevant meaning. Teaching scholars improve their own scholarship and the scholarship of their discipline by sharing new insights and innovations with others. A major barrier to be overcome here is the course content "ownership" felt by some. The scholarship of teaching and learning can grow if shared and improved. This cannot happen if we fail to divulge our best teaching ideas and content.

Applications for NACTA

The members of the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture are committed to advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning in the agricultural and life sciences. Current programs in NACTA that make teaching public, provide an avenue for critique, and help faculty improve and share the scholarship of teaching include:

- NACTA Journal (Public, critiqued, improved and shared)
- NACTA Annual Conference (Public, critiqued, improved and shared)
- NACTA newsletter (Public, improved and shared)
- NACTA website (Public, improved and shared)
- NACTA awards programs (Public, improved and shared)
- NACTA committees (Improved and shared)
- Local, regional, and national contacts (Improved and shared)

NACTA is also committed to continually improving programs and creating new ways for faculty to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning.

What is the Scholarship

Conclusion

The scholarship of teaching and learning makes teaching and learning public. Teaching is peer reviewed, critiqued, improved, and built upon by the scholarly community. The scholarship of teaching and learning must occur in a public forum, be replicable, and open to revision. Teaching becomes scholarly when we open the doors of our classroom for critique, are ready to improve our teaching with input from other teaching scholars, and we are willing to share our scholarly teaching to help others improve. NACTA offers a public forum for exhibiting our teaching and learning scholarship through the NACTA Journal, the NACTA website, our national conference, awards that recognize teaching excellence, and national, local and regional contacts with colleagues. The NACTA membership is committed to advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning to improve the academy and to have a positive impact on the lives of our students.

Literature Cited

- Atkinson, M.P., 2001. The scholarship of teaching and learning: Reconceptualizing scholarship and transforming the academy. *Social Forces*, 79(4). 1217-1230.
- Bender, E., and D. Gray. 1999. The scholarship of teaching. research and creative activity. <http://www.indiana.edu/~rcapub/v22n1/p03.html>. Accessed November 7, 2005.
- Boyer, E. L. 1990. *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities for the professorate*. Princeton, N.J.: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Brookfield, S.D. 1995. *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. 2005. CASTL Goals. <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/CASTL/index.html>. Accessed November 7, 2005
- Classic, C.E., M.T. Huber, and G.I. Maeroff. 1997. *Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professorate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hutchings, P., M. Babb, and C. Bjork,. 1998. *The scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education: An annotated bibliography*. Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Kreber, C. (ed.) 2001. *Scholarship revisited: Perspectives on the scholarship of teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schulman, L.S. 2000a. Presidents page of the web site for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/President/president.htm>. Accessed November 7, 2005.
- Schulman, L.S. 2000b. From minsk to pinsk: Why a scholarship of teaching and learning? *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. 1(1). 48-52.

Editor's Note:

At the June 2005 Executive Committee Meeting in Wooster, Ohio a motion was passed to define the purpose and promotion of NACTA more clearly by establishing the phrase "Advancing the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning" as the official tag line for NACTA. This change will be reflected on the March 2006 NACTA Journal new cover.